

CERCOSPORA LEAF SPOT OF PETUNIA

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The petunia ranks as the most popular flowering annual in America (2). Petunias are dependable, versatile, hardy to semi-hardy flowering plants useful in beds, borders, containers, and hanging baskets.

Modern varieties of petunia are hybrids of various species of Petunia in the Solanaceae and are designated Petunia X hybrida Hort. Vilm.-Andr. (4,6). They are native to tropical and subtropical South America (Argentina). The genus Petunia is composed of about 30 species, both annual and perennial (7).

In general, petunias are relatively free of leaf-spotting diseases (1,8). Of these leaf spots, Cercospora petuniae (Saito) Muller and Chupp (3) is infrequently observed, and probably routinely occurs at a low incidence under Florida conditions.

SYMPTOMS AND SIGNS. Cercospora leaf spot of petunia is characterized by circular to oval, brown lesions with a grayish white center and a darker brown border (Fig. 1). Leaf spots have been observed up to 11 mm in diameter. Spots occur most frequently on the lowermost leaves of the plant, with one to several spots per leaf, and occasionally coalescing. Sporulation of the pathogen occurs on both sides of the

leaf in the necrotic tissue; sometimes sporulation is heavier on the top side (3,5). Fruiting structures are so small as to be barely visible with the hand lens, appearing as yellow brown to gray tufts of conidiophores bearing conidia. The very long, acicular conidia are disseminated primarily by wind, sometimes assisted by water splash.

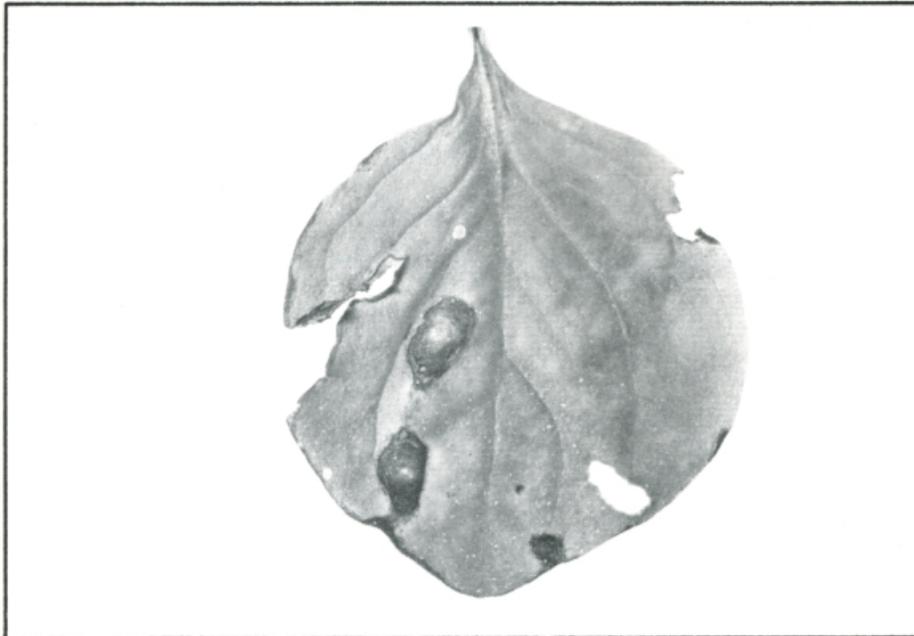


Fig. 1. Cercospora leaf spot of Petunia X hybrida caused by Cercospora petuniae.

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CONTROL. Control is probably unnecessary, since this leaf spot occurs infrequently and at a low incidence. Fungicides labelled for Botrytis control on petunia (benomyl, Duosan®, Zyban®, Daconil 2787®, and Ornalin®) should also be effective against Cercospora.

SURVEY AND DETECTION. The appearance of a few circular to oval, brown leaf spots with a grayish white center, predominantly on lower leaves, is evidence of this disease.

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